



# Review Article: Turning Back the Clock

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### TURNING BACK THE CLOCK\*

Love is after all a very personal and individual as well as universal experience, and love poetry is usually (among other things) the expression of an individual who is or has been in love.

—R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets*

By introducing the “image” of the poet, as distinct from the facts of the poet’s life, as the true content of relevant poetry, he can forbid us to use poetry for disengaging “mere historical information.”

—E. Badian, review of J. E. G. Zetzel’s contribution to B. K. Gold, ed., *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome*

Much recent scholarship has misjudged the Augustan poets in certain important respects, because it has been thought in principle possible to separate “literature” and “life,” as if they were clearly distinguishable entities; in reality the two affect each other in a ceaseless mutual interaction.

—J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life*

Critics of the nineteenth century, and some of the twentieth, knew what they wanted from the poetry of Catullus and the Augustans; culturally rooted in Romanticism and shackled by moral repression and prurience, the criticism of this age was simultaneously fascinated and repelled by the vastly more liberal attitudes to which the elegiac and lyric poets of Rome expressed their allegiance. Fascination naturally brought with it fantasy, as detailed calendars and diaries were created. Aided by the no less biographically oriented scholiastic tradition of Donatus, Servius, and others, critics confidently named girlfriends and rivals, plotted dates and places for the beginnings and ends of affairs, and in general created a battery of “facts” that still inhabit our handbooks and works of criticism.<sup>1</sup>

The advance of philological standards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in Greek philology and particularly in Germany, brought a change. The works of Reitzenstein, Leo, Norden, Skutsch, Fraenkel,

\**Latin Poets and Roman Life*. By JASPER GRIFFIN. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986. Pp. xiv + 226. \$29.95.

1. So we are told, and not just by Griffin (p. 16), that the notorious freedwoman Cytheris was the “mistress of Antony and Gallus” and the “heroine of Gallus’ elegies” (i.e., Lycoris). The connection with Gallus may be factual, but critics who stress the need for historical skepticism had perhaps better acknowledge that virtually our sole source for it is Servius (ad *Ecl.* 10. 1), whose tradition, with or without evidence, will not have resisted the need to find an identity for the *alium* of *Ecl.* 10. 22–23 (“tua cura Lycoris / perque niues alium perque horrida castra secuta est”). Antony is a good candidate: ergo, Lycoris = Cytheris.

and others produced a climate wherein language, style, technique, metaphor, and the traditions behind Latin poetry were considered the business of the critic; in short, approaches dealing more with verbal artifacts than with personality provided a critical alternative. The legacy of such critics cannot be overestimated, and the methods and approaches they established are in general those that have generated and still generate the most important criticism of Latin poetry. But excess and overinterpretation are the exclusive property of no critical mode, and there now abound articles and books that are no more satisfactory than the Romanticist works to which they largely react, as they deny the existence not only of Lesbia, but almost of Clodia Metelli, or make Cynthia a pure metaphor for poetry, or deny that Ovid ever went to the Black Sea.

## I

Griffin's book is in large part directed against extremes of this sort: he proposes to view Catullan and Augustan poetry (in the words of the dust jacket) "as a direct response to experience . . . criticising as mistaken theories which deny that directness."<sup>2</sup>

The hitherto-unpublished chapters treat the appearance of wine in Roman poetry (chap. 4), the pleasures of bathing, swimming, and nakedness (chap. 5), the poetic treatment of the notion of payment for sexual favors (chap. 6), the links between love and death (chap. 7), and the influence of Roman drama on personal poetry (chap. 10).<sup>3</sup> The introduction is largely a summary of the chapters, and there is no conclusion—a significant defect given G.'s claims of renovating the critical approach to Roman poetry. Since the book develops a more or less uniform proposition, that experience is the primary shaper of poetry, I shall treat G.'s approach by categories rather than summarize each chapter individually.

G.'s purpose throughout, in most of the previously published chapters and in all of those presented here for the first time, is to argue that the poetry of Catullus and the Augustans "cannot be amputated from an intimate connection with life" (p. xiv),<sup>4</sup> that such poetry is "about the many and various things which it professes to be about" (p. 49), that "Roman life, and particularly the life of luxury and pleasure, was so strongly Hellenistic in colouring and material that

2. In general there is a high level of polemic, and most of the chapters (cf. pp. 1–2, 33 n. 2, 48–50, 90, 163–65, 183–86, 198–200) begin with the tactic—increasingly tedious over the course of the book—of identifying the enemy, then proceeding to the argument. At the same time the state of critical affairs is often presented artificially in black and white; there are, for instance, nonexperiential ways of reading Horace and Propertius other than those proposed by F. Cairns in his *Generic Composition in Greek and Latin Literature* (Edinburgh, 1972), a work whose thesis is in any case unduly simplified, then summarily dismissed (pp. 50–52).

3. The assiduous reader of periodicals should be advised before purchasing the book that five of the ten chapters, 100 of the 210 pages, are unaltered reprints of G.'s published articles on Latin poetry. And bibliographical updating is minimal; for instance, in the chapter on *Georgics* 4 the eighteen works cited (dating from 1962 to 1977) in the original article of 1979 are supplemented by only one (from 1984), although much has been written in the intervening years. One result of presenting what amount to *Kleine Schriften* as a sustained book is that the parts do not always fit the alleged theme. This is particularly true of the excellent article on *Georgics* 4, which is one of the most important readings of that poem, but which has little to do with the central theme of the present book.

4. This is G.'s overriding claim, and the formula occurs throughout (cf. pp. 3, 16–17, 21, 32, 47, 49, 64, 87, 143, 197, 210).

no simple division into 'Greek' and 'Roman' elements is possible" (pp. 2-3),<sup>5</sup> that our interpretation of Augustan poetry cannot be unaffected by the realities that can be shown to have existed in that society (pp. 28-29). He therefore sets out to demonstrate, insofar as demonstration is possible, that the objects, events, and attitudes that exist in the lyric and elegiac poetry of Rome were features of Roman society, and that their appearance in poetry is largely to be explained because they were features of society. There was an interest in the seaside, and the seaside plays a role in this poetry; various attitudes toward prostitutes are possible in society and are reflected in poetry; various types of *convivia*—modest, philosophical, or wild—occurred in reality and are handled in poetry, and so on.

*Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo*: we are not a stone's throw away from the biographical criticism of the last century. Although G. is at pains to distinguish his approach from that criticism (p. 1: "The aim is not to reconstruct the *vie passionelle* of the poet, but to discover the setting and the tone in which he means his poems to be read"), his allegiances are clear throughout, and the criticism that emerges from such an approach is not distinguishable from what is, in normal usage, termed "biographical criticism"—as when, for instance, he follows the view of La Penna that "Horace when young and poor had to undergo with wealthy women of a certain age the experiences he evokes so repulsively in the *Epodes*" (p. 22). To this sort of fantasy most now prefer explanations that look to Archilochus and the tradition of iambic poetry. G. benefits from the progress of the intervening years, and his argument is more cautious and more sophisticated than that of straightforwardly biographical critics,<sup>6</sup> but the animal is fully recognizable.<sup>7</sup> Since he is by no means alone in this approach, and since the approach emanates from influential quarters, it is worth reviewing the issue in some detail.

## II

Much of what G. has to say is quite clearly correct and far less controversial than he would have us believe. Wine, parties, swimming, an interest in clothes, perfume, and jewelry, and so on—the themes that appear throughout Catullan and Augustan poetry—were certainly elements of Roman life, and G.'s greatest

5. So, for instance, we should not see the *Odes* of Horace as containing Hellenistic elements; all can be explained in terms of Roman society.

6. G. is particularly fond of a rhetorical construction that appears to disavow the biographical approach but in fact comes close to embracing it: p. 26: "Of course we are not to start writing a diary of Horace's intrigues. . . . But the central question with Augustan poetry remains that of its removal from reality" (minimal, in G.'s view); pp. 46-47: "Of course it is not being claimed that Propertius was inspired to his conception of the life of love only by the career of Antony. . . . But such a life as that of Antony does, I think, have a particular interest."

7. G.'s real allegiances are clear not only from the content of the book in general, but from the tone and progression of the encapsulation on pp. 48-49: "In the time of our grandfathers a popular and respected way of avoiding the difficulty of talking about poetry was to transform it into biography. . . . The method is now, among the more knowledgeable, out of favour. . . . In enlightened quarters . . . the quest to identify Virgil's farm . . . raises only a weary smile. To such an extreme, indeed, have the enthusiastic carried this abstention, that in some places it is now a dogma that *no* experience of the poet is to be allowed to raise its head in the interpretation of his poems: I need only mention Pindar." This, of course, assumes that we know something about the "experience" of a Pindar or a Vergil: cf. below, pp. 61-62.

contribution over the last decade (particularly in his "Augustan Poetry and the Life of Luxury," *JRS* 66 [1976]: 87–105 = chap. 1) has been to document the references to such elements. To the social historian that is of great interest, as it is also to the literary critic. But to claim that documenting these details is itself criticism is a different matter; no form of art, least of all poetry, is explained because we have authenticated the social milieu in which it presents itself. That there was a "presence and importance in Rome since at least 160 B.C. of Greek courtesans and boys" (p. 15) is of interest and makes the setting of many of Horace's *Odes* socially plausible; but let us not equate that discovery with criticism. Picnics and al fresco dining of course occurred in Rome (as doubtless in every society whose climate made them appealing), and *Odes* 1. 17 does therefore have a basis in reality (p. 21); but the miraculous events of that poem, its evocation of a mythical golden age transported to Horace's Sabine farm, and the power of poetry in this setting are surely the "facts" from which explication must proceed.<sup>8</sup>

*Odes* 2. 7 teaches a lesson. Horace was indeed at Philippi, and he was indeed on the losing side. If we lacked Greek lyric poetry and were unaware of the tradition of ῥησασπία, we might well assume, when Horace refers to his ignominious flight with the words *relicta non bene parmula*, that he indeed threw away his shield, since such an act is plausible on the field of battle. For that matter, perhaps he did throw away his shield (if he had one). But the point of his claiming to have done so is to place himself in the tradition of Archilochus and Alcaeus; it is as clear a statement of affiliation as his use of the Alcaic stanza in the same poem. That the admission is at least plausible in terms of Horace's life gives the poem added power, but any "reality" has been accommodated to an overriding "literary" framework.<sup>9</sup>

Nor can the existence of a social phenomenon plausibly be invoked as the sole or major *raison d'être* of a poetic theme; there may be other impulses. When the Rutulian Rhoetus hides as his drunken and sleeping comrades are slaughtered at *Aeneid* 9. 346 (*magnum metuens se post cratera tegebat*), G. is reminded of "the realistic use of the furniture of the *convivium*" (p. 87). I doubt that Vergil ever witnessed such a *convivium*; and even if he did, he certainly did not need it in

8. On the significant claim by Horace that Pan, as Faunus, leaves Arcadia for the Sabine farm, bringing with him a protection that aligns the farm with the Isles of the Blest in *Epode* 16, G. is content to note: "*Odes* 1. 17 opens with a charming picture of Faunus/Pan coming from Arcadia to look after Horace's flocks on his estate" (p. 20).

9. Generally G. avoids treating poems where there are such clear literary resonances behind ostensibly biographical details. So, for instance, with the amatory characters in poems of Catullus and in Horace's *Odes*: he finds that Acme (Catull. 45) is a freedwoman, that Lycidas (*Odes* 1. 4) belongs to the realities of symposiastic life (against G. Williams, who has identified him with the "fantasies of Greek symposiastic verse"); but G. avoids mention of a woman like Lalage (*Odes* 1. 22), whose name (λαλαγέω) glosses her behavior, *dulce loquentem* (24)—a phrase that, with the parallel *dulce ridentem* (23), associates her both with Lesbians in Catull. 51. 5 (*dulce ridentem*) and with Lesbians' model in Sappho 31. 3–4 (ἄδῃ φωνεῖ-/σας [i.e., *dulce loquentem*]; the phrase is not represented in Catullus, whose *dulce ridentem* responds to Sappho's γελαισας ἰμέροεν [5]). Horace, then, refers to both predecessors. We are here at several removes from the simple representation of reality, and this is hardly an isolated case. By the same token G. excludes from his book the clearly programmatic or metaphorical poetry of Catullus, Horace, and Propertius that for other critics provides a valid basis for the metaphorical or subliminal interpretation of "straightforward" poems.

order to create this image.<sup>10</sup> Swimming and bathing, we are told (pp. 89–91), were very popular in Rome; so for G. “Leander appealed to Roman, not to Greek, taste. Perhaps it will be right to connect this with the greater role of the seaside and of water sports in Rome” (p. 92).<sup>11</sup> Nonsense. It appealed because it exemplified a certain type of passion and the results of such passion. Did the story of Myrrha appeal because of the greater role of incest, that of Io because the gadfly problem had increased, that of Europa because bull-riding had become popular?

The general deficiency of G.’s approach is most evident on page 93, where he finds the picture of the nymphs swimming around the Argo at Catullus 64. 14–18 to be an instance of “fantasy . . . at work on the realities of swimming for pleasure”:

emersere feri candenti e gurgite vultus  
aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes.  
illa atque haud alia viderunt luce marinas  
mortales oculis nudato corpore Nymphas  
nutricum tenus exstantes e gurgite cano.

In passing he cites and implicitly dismisses the view that the lines are literary and traditional in nature;<sup>12</sup> but he fails even to mention the evidence for that view, the passages from Apollonius Rhodius (*Argon.* 4. 930–38) and Accius (391–406 Ribbeck) where shepherds marvel (cf. *admirantes*) at the same Argo and, more importantly, where the same Nereids sport like dolphins around the ship. For G. their half-naked state in Catullus is a result of the poet’s having looked at wall-paintings (which he may have done);<sup>13</sup> but for my money he probably provided an erotic embellishment of *Argonautica* 4. 940 (which he did look at): αὐτίκ’ ἀνασχόμεναι λευκοῖς ἐπὶ γούνασι πέζας. In Catullus we get a different glimpse, but that is in the nature of the best imitation: while recognizable as imitation, it is rarely a carbon copy.

Likewise, when Europa at Horace *Odes* 3. 27. 52 prays that she may be naked (*nuda*) when she is torn to pieces by wild animals, G. sees a reference to naked women in art, and to the “sadistic pleasures of watching in the amphitheatre” (p. 107). Again, perhaps; but surely we want at least to allow that Horace is modeling his Europa on Catullus’ Ariadne, who like Europa regrets leaving her

10. Much more likely, he is suggesting a parallel with *G.* 2. 456–57, where the death of the Centaurs likewise shows the destructive powers of wine (“ . . . Rhoecumque [Rhoetumque MR] Pholumque / et magno Hylaeum Lapithis cratere minantem”). G. is in general intolerant of the use of other literary passages to explain poetry—on which more later.

11. Gelzer’s Loeb of Musaeus is invoked to support the claim that there was never a great Hellenistic poem on Leander, but this is hardly conventional wisdom (see H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons in *Supplementum Hellenisticum* ad frag. 951); and I find it difficult to believe that the first extant prominent treatment of the myth (Verg. *G.* 3. 258–63), which is allusive in the extreme (it contains no proper name or specific identifying details: Leander and Hero are merely *iuvenis* and *virgo*, the Hellespont merely *freta*), does not presuppose another, reasonably prominent version—obviously Hellenistic.

12. Cf. R. F. Thomas, “Catullus and the Polemics of Poetic Reference,” *AJP* 103 (1982): 144–64.

13. Although the presence of half-naked Nereids in art seems to be subsequent to (and motivated by?) Catullus’ famous lines; cf. G. Herzog-Hauser, “Nereiden,” *RE* 33 (1936): 21, “die spätere Kunst lässt sie meist mit nacktem Oberkörper erscheinen”; and F. Cairns, “The Nereids of Catullus 64. 12–23b,” *GB* 11 (1984): 96, n. 3. In literature they otherwise appear in this state only at Lucian *Dial. Mar.* 15. 3 ἡμίγυμνοι αἱ πολλαί.

father and her home (64. 171–81), who is likewise in an undressed state (63–67), and who likewise contemplates a death inflicted on her by wild animals (152–53).

In short, if this book were entitled *Roman Life as Extrapolated from Latin Poetry*, if it did not claim to present as a sufficient and consistently applicable mode of inquiry one that finds the function of poetry merely to be the depiction of a lifestyle, coinciding as far as can be shown with reality, then the objections would be far fewer. But since this is not the case, since G. claims to be a critic rather than a historian or sociologist, his book must be judged as criticism and must be found wanting.

All this leads to another central flaw in G.'s method: he is extremely unwilling to allow that reading was a part of "Roman life," that the imagination and genius of poets such as Catullus, Vergil, Horace, Propertius, and Ovid may have been as stimulated by the written word as by a scene encountered on the streets of Rome or the beaches around Naples. This is of course a natural corollary to the overall insistence that experience, rather than literature, lies behind much of the poetry of Rome. Rome, we are told (pp. 8–9), was "full of Greek works of art, both sculptures and paintings," suggesting "*luxuria*, debauchery," features coinciding with and helping to create "the whole *uita* of love and pleasure [as] extolled by Propertius." But Rome was also full of Greek books, a fact that G. seems loath to admit. At one point he notes: "It is striking how little the poets have to say about the Library" (p. 5, n. 30)—apparently implying that they had no interest in its contents. Elsewhere he notes that "the private life of the Latin love poets will have borne little resemblance to that of the modern scholar" (p. 17).<sup>14</sup> But Catullus makes it quite clear that research is an integral part of poetry when he states that poetic activity is impossible at Verona: "scriptorum non magna est copia apud me, / . . . huc una ex multis capsula me sequitur" (68. 33, 36). Horace, even in the *Satires*, implies the same scholarly basis for poetic composition; Damasippus chides him for his inactivity (2. 3. 11–12): "quorsum pertinuit stipare Platona Menandro, / Eupolin, Archilochum, comites educere tantos [sc. si raro scribis]?" It is not through laziness that Vergil produced the *Georgics* at the rate of one line per day; to imagine Ovid writing the *Metamorphoses* at an uncluttered desk is impossible. And the same goes for the elegists. There can be little doubt that Propertius had Meleager 103 Page before him as he wrote the first lines of the *Monobiblos*—on which G. is content to note: "He introduces himself to the reader as suffering in the very first grip of love" (p. 131). So he does, but there is more to it than that.

### III

For G. the ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε-*Frage* is easily answered: details from the "real" world, where they coincide with poetic details, have precedence. The attitude is most fully exemplified by chapter 2 ("Propertius and Antony"), where Propertius is held to model himself on Antony—in his attitude toward love, in the manner of his death, and so forth. Two objections need to be made. First, the

14. In my experience there is no single "life of the modern scholar"; some are degenerate, some pious, others just dull—and their ways of life need not produce any particular type of scholarship.

evidence is forced. At 3. 11. 1–4 Propertius asks, “Why be surprised that a woman runs my life?”; he then proceeds, typically, to give examples from myth and history: Medea, Omphale, Semiramis, and Cleopatra were also dominant. The poem then becomes a diatribe against Cleopatra, on whom the focus remains. Antony is never mentioned; and although he is implicitly in the background (so is Julius Caesar, by the same argument), this hardly amounts to any sort of consistent self-depiction. In 2. 16, it is true, Propertius uses Antony as an exemplum: the poet has been degrading himself because Cynthia is with a rival; he should have a sense of shame, but lovers never do—look at the way Antony behaved. This is rather a small peg on which to hang so large a hat; and as G. notes, Antony is not the only historical or public figure so depicted: Alcibiades, Alexander, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Sulla, Catiline, Caesar are all painted in similar colors. Many of G.’s “parallels,” moreover, are tenuous in the extreme. The moralistic tradition compared Antony to Paris (although the connection is not attested before Plutarch), so when we find Propertius invoking Paris (a fairly natural move for a love-poet), G. extrapolates from there (pp. 34–35). Or again, on page 43: “Antony identified himself with Dionysus; Bacchus is surprisingly prominent in Propertius”—by this argument Horace depicts himself as Antony.

Which brings us to the other objection. Although he briefly addresses and dismisses the question, G. fails to entertain satisfactorily the possibility that the very details of Antony’s life from which he fashions his interpretation may themselves be sensationalized and partly fictional. Our source for most of the material is Plutarch’s *Life*, which is not particularly encouraging; and G.’s attempts, for instance, to show that Propertius was familiar with the details of Antony’s and Cleopatra’s deaths are rather halfhearted. Though it is true that Plutarch, for one minor detail of Cleopatra’s death, cites the physician Olympus, who attended her and wrote of the event (*Ant.* 82),<sup>15</sup> there can be little doubt that Augustan propaganda painted both the life and the death of Antony in the lurid colors in which they now appear.<sup>16</sup> What better *vita* to impose on Antony than that of the elegiac *amator*?

This same failure to entertain the possibility that literary phenomena may influence social practice is found in chapter 7 (“Love and Death”), where the coincidences between sepulchral inscriptions and poetry are used to demonstrate the proposition that attitudes toward love and death in the poets are related to those in society. The suggestion is in itself perfectly unobjectionable; but when G. observes that the epitaph containing the line *ossibus hic uxor miscuit ossa meis* (*Carm. Epigr.* 1136. 2) “can stand without shame beside one of the greatest lines of Propertius” (4. 7. 93–94 “nunc te possideant aliae: mox sola tenebo. / mecum eris et mixtis ossibus ossa teram”), he might have added that it can do so because it was modeled, at whatever remove, on Propertius.<sup>17</sup> That the composers of sepulchral *sententiae* looked to the poets for inspiration needs no

15. He is not otherwise mentioned or known, and Plutarch does not seem to have used him as a source in any general way.

16. Cf. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 270–71.

17. Or on Ov. *Ars am.* 3. 21 or *Met.* 11. 706. Cf. most recently D. R. Shackleton Bailey, “Propertius IV. 7. 94: An Appendix,” *AJP* 103 (1982): 213–14.



argument.<sup>18</sup> And the idea in this particular *sententia* is as old as Homer: *Iliad* 23. 91 ὥς δὲ καὶ ὅστέα νῶϊν ὁμῇ σορὸς ἀμφικαλύπτοι. Indeed, Propertius' lines may well constitute a literary reference: the final words addressed by the ghost of Cynthia to Propertius recall those of the ghost of Patroclus to Achilles.

In both of the instances above G. is convicted of anachronism and of forcing the evidence, against its will, to fit his general thesis. These are serious critical lapses, and they are particularly serious in a critic who spends four entire pages (pp. 49–52) on a diatribe against Cairns' use of Menander Rhetor to establish the generic categories of Hellenistic and Augustan poetry.

#### IV

Those critics who in varying degrees accept as factual the world presented by the poet for the most part occupy themselves with personal genres, in particular love poetry—that is, they credit as factual a genre that presents a plausible lifestyle with which most readers can readily identify. All but two of G.'s chapters concern such poetry; and of those two chapters, one has little to do with the central theme of his book.<sup>19</sup> The view of Lyne (who acknowledges G. in his preface and is in turn acknowledged) has already been noted: "love poetry is usually . . . the expression of an individual who is or has been in love" (above, epigraph). G. is himself more cautious, preferring to speak of the "life of love." Nonetheless, he implicitly connects the portrayal of that life with the poet's, usually with a degree of wary qualification that leaves the reader somewhat puzzled: "even before Cynthia, the maid-servant Lycinna taught him to love (Prop. 3. 15). Not, that is to say, an autobiographical utterance, in principle true or false to historical facts, but rather an implication that she, too, was 'important' to the poet: the relationship was a significant one, it 'made a difference'" (p. 131). Personal poetry, unlike drama, epic, didactic, even pastoral, naturally presents itself in a credible and immediate setting; but if we resist the impulse to identify character with playwright in drama, to turn Theocritus from an urbane poet into a shepherd, or to make Vergil a participant in the world he builds in the *Georgics*, should we not similarly believe that the realism of personal poetry is necessitated by genre and need have nothing to do with the life of the poet? Elegy may ultimately be as mimetic as those other genres.

In the same vein it is a curious phenomenon that the type of criticism represented by G. and others is confined to Latin lyric and elegy. Critics of Greek lyric take it for granted that their subject is literary, and their approach to it addresses literary concerns, the relationship of lyric diction to the Homeric poems, the treatment of myth, the use of metaphor, and so on. The reason for the discrepancy is, I think, that we know so much more about Roman society

18. Cf. R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana, Ill., 1942), p. 17; cf. in general E. Lissberger, *Das Fortleben der römischen Elegiker in den Carmina Epigraphica* (Ph.D. diss., Tübingen, 1934). The debt is quite clear, whether or not we follow R. Cagnat's view ("Les manuels professionnels de graveurs d'inscriptions romaines," *RPh* 13 [1889]: 51–65), by no means demolished by B. Lier ("Topica Carminum Sepulcralium Latinorum," *Philologus* 62 [1903]: 445–77, 563–603), that stonecutters worked from some sort of manual of sepulchral *bons mots*; G. ignores or is unaware of the whole literature on this subject.

19. Cf. above, n. 3.

and history of the first century B.C.—the critic's business seems to intersect so much more with that of the historian. Some literary critics, therefore, following the lead of historians who perforce, and sometimes rightly, use poetry as source material, tend to treat personal poetry as documents that can readily supply us with facts. E. Badian (above, epigraph) speaks of the "facts of the poet's life," and G., inevitably using the example of arch-Romantics like Baudelaire,<sup>20</sup> notes that the "private life of Latin love poets" coincided with their self-depictions (p. 17). M. Lefkowitz has shown us how the *vitae* of Greek poets tend to be drawn from the poetry itself,<sup>21</sup> and Catullus 16 (a poem that G. does not understand [pp. 17–18]) stands as the very poet's insistence that we *separate* "life" and "literature."<sup>22</sup> And in the case of the Latin poets, even when our sources lived only a hundred years or a few hundred years after the poets themselves (e.g., Donatus or Servius), we had better beware of taking seriously anything they say about the poets, given that their critical abilities tend to be inferior, their understanding of poetry on a level with the poetry that their contemporaries were producing. Did Vergil and Varus learn Epicureanism from Siro the Syracusan, as some believe (cf. Servius on *Eclogue* 6. 11), or have the two poets merely been identified with Chromis and Mnasyllus in *Eclogue* 6, since Silenus (i.e., "Siro"), who sounds rather Epicurean (cf. 31–40), "teaches" them with his song? *Catalepton* 5 proves nothing, and Servius' notice shows how the "fact" became established. Ultimately we have no facts about the lives of Vergil or Propertius that can be used safely in interpreting their poetry.<sup>23</sup> Horace is a special case, but even here we should be careful about taking him at his word—*memento parmulae*.

It is true that G. treats other genres, chiefly drama in chapter 10 ("The Influence of Drama").<sup>24</sup> Here he seems to depart from his overall theme, coming close to familiar and less archaic approaches, as he argues that a literary genre had a significant impact on elegy; indeed, at times he contradicts his own thesis.<sup>25</sup> But there is here a certain perversity: just as G. expends so much effort

20. G.'s parallels throughout are nineteenth-century figures (e.g., Baudelaire, Stendhal), whose views on the coincidence of life and art are thrust back onto the Augustans.

21. *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore and London, 1981).

22. The reading of Williams, Nisbet and Hubbard, and others (see p. 18, n. 172), that "Catullus replies [to Furius and Aurelius] that a poet uses an autobiographical form but that this is poetic license and no evidence for his life," is clearly correct. For G. such a reading is invalidated by the recapitulation in the final line, *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*. Of course that line deliberately and with exquisite irony plays off Catullus' claim in lines 5–6 ("nam castum esse decet pium poetam / ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est"); but it does not imply that the threat will be carried out—the point is precisely that the threat belongs to the *versiculi*, not to the *vita*, and can therefore be made without vitiating the separable morality of the poet's life. As G. notes, Catull. 16 is indeed a "cornerstone in the argument" (p. 17), but it belongs to a different building.

23. The evidence for Vergil has been intelligently examined by H. Naumann, "Die Vergil-Legende," *Mnemosyne* 35 (1982): 148–53 (see esp. his conclusion, p. 151).

24. This is to be distinguished from the approach in chap. 9 ("The Creation of Characters in the *Aeneid*")—unfortunately printed as "*Aenid*" in the running heads, where it is argued that contemporary issues were important in the formation of Vergil's epic. Nobody has ever denied that, and the limited points G. makes do nothing to support his general view of Latin poetry as primarily a response to experience.

25. As on p. 204: "The 'praetor,' who at one point in the poem [Prop. 2. 16] seems to be called *barbarus* and an ex-slave, is less a portrait of a real person than a literary creation drawing on the upstart and rootless soldiers of comedy." Once we have allowed that (as we certainly must), the way is clear for seeing the portrayals of Cynthia and Propertius himself as "literary creations."

to diminish the importance of the literature that is conventionally accepted as formative, so here he attempts to promote the role of an "undervalued" genre. And it is noteworthy that the genre he promotes is itself the most mimetic of the type of lifestyle that is his subject, populated as it is by the *amator*, the *puella*, the rival, and so forth.

For G. it is specifically Roman drama that influences elegy; and he dismisses as "magisterial pronouncements" (p. 198) the theories of Leo and Jacoby that apparent coincidences between elegy and Roman comedy are to be seen as references either to Greek New Comedy or to a Hellenistic intermediary, be it epigram or some sort of lost subjective elegy. But Leo in particular did not merely make pronouncements; he presented evidence.<sup>26</sup> And G. ignores those pronouncements of the elegists themselves that make it quite clear that Menander was considered a model for amatory themes: Propertius 3. 21. 28 *docte Menandre*, 4. 5. 43 *mundi Thais pretiosa Menandri* (where Cynthia is advised to model herself on the hetaira of New Comedy); Ovid *Tristia* 2. 369 *fabula iucundi nulla est sine amore Menandri*. About Plautus, on the other hand, they are silent—a fact that suggests to G. the opposite of what it would to most: "Horace is careful never to admit being influenced by [Roman comedy]" (p. 200). And when Horace does talk of Plautus, in the *Epistles*, his damning criticism (*valeat res ludicra . . .*) is distorted and minimized: "Horace . . . shows an easy familiarity with Roman comedy, however superior he feels to its technical laxness" (p. 207). In fact the major "proof" of the influence of Roman drama on the elegists, apart from a few unsupported but insistent pronouncements,<sup>27</sup> turns out to be Cicero's interest in both Roman comedy and Roman tragedy. But I would suggest that one of the main reasons Roman drama had little appeal to these poets was precisely because it was favored by the likes of Cicero.

After inviting us to accept the influence of Roman drama on elegy, G. seems to remember as an afterthought the title and theme of his work and ends the chapter, and the book, with a jolting non sequitur: "there never had been any opposition of principle between Greek and Roman, between literature and life" (p. 210).

Although G. is highly selective with his material, for the most part choosing to treat only poetry susceptible of superficial interpretation that presumes a direct equation of life and literature, he is inevitably compelled to admit that literature is more than the portrayal of a lifestyle. But he generally does so in passing, since development of alternative approaches would tend to impair his overall theoretical framework. So on page 28, in a footnote, he tells us that "Propertius himself regarded the 'neoteric' poets as his predecessors." If this is so, and it

26. *Plautinische Forschungen*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1912), pp. 140–57.

27. E.g., p. 202: "Surely the fifteenth poem of the third book of Propertius, in which the story of Antiope is told at length and in an allusive style, must be composed with consciousness of Pacuvius' play." Why not that of Euripides? And the presence of Zethus and Amphion on Jason's cloak (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1. 735–46) guarantees that there was a Hellenistic interest—as does Propertius' "allusive style." G. also believes that Pacuvius is behind the image of Amphion at *Ecl.* 2. 23–24 "canto quae solitus . . . / Amphion Dircaeus in Actaeo Aracyntho"; but the background of this is clearly Alexandrian: Amphion as a miraculous singer is found before Vergil and Propertius only at Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1. 740–41 and Apollod. 3. 5. 5 (he does not so function in Hom. *Od.* 11. 260–65 or in Hyginus' summary of Euripides).

certainly is, then Lesbia, and Lycoris after her, are predecessors of Cynthia, a fact that could well imply something about her relation to reality. On pages 100–101, while developing the notion that swimming is frequently mentioned in Latin poetry because it was frequently enjoyed in Roman life, and having stated (p. 92) that “classical Greek poetry is strangely uninterested in swimming,”<sup>28</sup> he observes quite rightly that “the theme of pretty girls swimming occurs in Hellenistic poetry.” He does not, however, proceed to the mandatory conclusion that that is precisely where we would expect to find a theme prominent in the poetry of Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid. In treating the theme of love-tokens in Propertius and Ovid he uncharacteristically but rightly points to a literary model, Acontius and Cydippe in that “celebrated episode in the *Aetia* of Callimachus” (p. 113). And at page 194, his general theme that the *Aeneid* draws upon contemporary Roman life not surprisingly lapses: “When Dido appears in the light of the young Nausicaa or the touching Ariadne, part of our response to her derives from our response to those models and to the emotional resonance which they bring with them.” If that is true of Dido (which it certainly is), why not also of Cynthia in Propertius 1. 3?<sup>29</sup>

G. does, however, have a mechanism for dealing with the failure of life and literature to coincide. He terms this the “stylisation” of real experience. For instance, the poets talk of wine at *convivia* but generally avoid (as their Hellenistic models do) detailed discussion of food. For G. this is a “striking omission,” an example of the “stylising of experience” (p. 82). Of course it is “striking” only if we approach poetry as a medium that is a faithful and exhaustively complete “response to experience.” But as even Servius knew, *artis poeticae est non omnia dicere*. The fantasy of Horace *Odes* 1. 17 is in G.’s view (p. 21) “not a fantasy in no relation to life, a ‘dream,’ but a stylized and refined version of reality.” Similarly, on pages 114–15, the *leno*’s absence from elegy is seen as an example of the poets’ “stylisation of their world.” But another way of putting this might be that “in generic terms the *leno* has no place in elegy,” or perhaps that “the *leno* is so strongly associated with comedy that his existence is completely suppressed by the elegists.” In any case, whether we call it “suppression” or “stylisation,” the omission flies in the face of the view that poetry is primarily a direct response to experience.

## V

General assumptions about society and morality, even when historical accuracy is invoked, are seldom free from prejudice but may rather be rooted in the critic’s own moral outlook. Much of G.’s actual criticism, when he pauses long enough from the documenting of social phenomena to give it to us, seems hopelessly subjective and personal. Perhaps the most extreme instance occurs at pages 107–8, which treat Ovid’s highly erotic yet restrained account of his

28. It is not so strange if one thinks in terms of genre and subject matter: Medea, Antigone, and Electra have no reason to go near the water. Odysseus, however, does, and if we want to talk of swimming and beach scenes in literature, we had better not omit, as G. does, *Od.* 5 and 6, which provide a literary archetype for the erotic associations of the seashore.

29. Cf. below, p. 68.

afternoon assignation with Corinna (*Am.* 1. 5). G.'s theme is the poets' avoidance of the issue of payment, but look how he gets there:

Why does Corinna appear at such a perfect moment? The thirty-second poem of Catullus helps us to answer the question. There Catullus tells Ipsitilla, a very exciting girl but not one with whom one needed to use much ceremony, to give him an assignation that afternoon: she is to stay in, not to take it into her head to go out for a walk, and to prepare for nine successive acts of love with the lust-tormented poet. *Reason suggests that if Corinna appeared it was because she had been sent for; and if she was the sort of girl who came when she was sent for, she was a professional, like Ipsitilla.* Why, then, neither in Catullus nor in Ovid any allusion to payment? [italics mine]

This is astonishing; why should the invitation "Why don't you come around at about 1 P.M.?" imply in Ovid's Rome, any more than it does now, that the addressee is a prostitute? On the contrary, if Lesbia is Clodia, Cynthia Hostia, and so on, would not the assignations have been prearranged, precisely as occurs in *Amores* 1. 5? (And Ovid nowhere says or implies that he "sent for" Corinna, merely that he was expecting her.) Did Catullus and Lesbia arrive ostentatiously arm in arm at the house provided by Allius (68. 68 *isque domum nobis isque dedit dominae*), or was not the situation (if it occurred) rather as it is in Ovid's poem? Nor, incidentally, is there any reason to assume that Ipsitilla of Catullus 32 (if, as seems unlikely, she was a real woman) was a prostitute. It is a delightfully obscene little poem, hardly in need of explication and blessedly resistant to the analysis of the social historian. We are neither invited nor expected to inquire into the social status of Ipsitilla; the poem turns rather on the humorous self-portrayal of the last three lines.

It is significant that much of G.'s evidence for equating the life of the love poet with his material is taken from the social and literary history of the nineteenth century. The obscenity of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* is explained by the fact that (p. 17) "at this time Baudelaire was thirty-six and had been living for fifteen years a life of 'luxury, frivolity, and dissipation.'" On page 3 a critic of Stendhal is quoted as observing that that writer "in attempting the seduction of Melanie Guilbert 'can never forget the example of Laclos' Valmont'"; we are told (p. 3) that "Delacroix, to maintain a high level of romantic fervour, reminds himself of passages from Byron." Precisely. The ostentatious lives of the Romantics, their noisy insistence on the immediacy and spontaneity of their art and on its intersection with life—these are the very problems with which this article began. To impose such attitudes on the seventeenth century, let alone the first century B.C., would be misguided and itself a piece of Romanticism.

One of G.'s clarion calls is that the straightforward reading of poetry, the acceptance that poetry is "about the many and various things which it professes to be about, such as life and love" (p. 49), makes the poetry much more "interesting" than if we look for deeper levels of meaning. So *Odes* 3. 8 and 3. 29 are "more interesting and convey a greater impression of warmth than the rather disengaged poem [1. 6] to the unpoetical Agrippa" (p. 79). Students of the *recusatio* might disagree, finding *Odes* 1. 6 an exquisite adaptation of a traditional theme to the poet's surroundings, a statement not about "life" but about the poet's art. That of course tends to make it less autobiographical—but less "interesting"?

In general G. prefers the simple reading to the complex. So on the subject of Cynthia's paddling on the Lucrine in her "small boat" (Prop. 1. 11. 9–12), he is content to agree with La Penna and go no further than summarize the lines, stating that the reader is "encouraged to linger on the brilliant picture of Cynthia in her diminutive boat or swimming in the clear and yielding water" (p. 90) and rejecting D. O. Ross' attempts to detect in the "excessive stylization" of the image deeper levels of meaning and reference.<sup>30</sup> He also misunderstands Ross (p. 90: "Some scholars have disliked the passage, like D. O. Ross"); but Ross, who clearly and positively delights in these lines, understands what G. does not, that it is not the primary business of a critic merely to convey his "like" or "dislike." And G. naturally does not mention that other Propertian *cumba*, now with Propertius himself on board (3. 3), which, Apollo advises, the poet (like Cynthia) is to keep close to the shore and well away from the "open sea" (23–24). On what picture is the reader here encouraged to linger?<sup>31</sup>

## VI

G.'s views are motivated by and are in reaction against two major critical modes, neither one in itself particularly novel or revolutionary. The first encourages us to view poetry in terms of its adherence to, or its alteration or development of, genre. Cairns' book is perhaps the strongest statement of this view, but the outlook pervades the work of all critics of classical literature. Anyone who considers Theocritus while reading the *Eclogues*, who uses the term "propempticon" at least as a convenient descriptive term for *Epode* 10 or *Odes* 1. 3, who allows the Homeric poems to be a factor when considering the *Aeneid*, is indulging in generic criticism, and G. is among this group. The other mode to which he opposes himself, slightly distinct from the generic approach, detects the poet's use of literary predecessors and uses this as a basis for interpretation: "The discovery of parallels is not, let us say with emphasis, an explanation for such a thing [as the motif of the excluded lover]; in fact the more parallels we find, the more pressing becomes the need to make sense of the phenomenon, in terms both of human nature, which changes very little, and of human society, which changes a great deal" (p. 54). For the sake of argument I shall allow the questionable logic of this asseveration;<sup>32</sup> but I might summarize the preceding

30. Ross (*Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy and Rome* [Cambridge, 1975], p. 76) convincingly shows that the word-order and diction of these lines are intensely learned, or "neoteric," and that they have affinities to the style of 1. 20, a poem surely indebted in many ways to Cornelius Gallus.

31. Elsewhere interpretation seems to be downright silly and more hastily produced than we would expect from a scholar who has at times shown himself to be a perceptive reader. Some examples. Page xi: "The discomfort of the Roman toga reinforced the longing for poetic nakedness"—and whose nakedness did the poets long for? Page 97 (in support of the claim that the real, recreational use of the seashore greatly affects even mythological poetry): "It was on the beach that Cornix was pursued by Neptune, and on the beach that Caenus was enjoyed by him"—would we expect to find Neptune in the middle of the desert? Page 137 (on Ov. *Met.* 10. 291–94, where Pygmalion's statue comes to life): "perhaps it reflects . . . the ideal course of a specifically Roman marriage, with the virginal and frozen young bride thawing into life and love, under the affectionate and gentle hands of her husband"—nothing in the text leads to this. Page 149: "poets could find poetic power in the idea that death is the end of delight"—poets are hardly alone in this.

32. Poetry that is highly conscious of tradition may be allowed to have perpetuated themes or motifs (with some new contribution of detail) partly in recognition of the importance of that tradition, partly

pages by stating that the “discovery of a phenomenon in society is not, let us say with equal emphasis, an explanation for such a thing in poetry.” In rejecting the importance of literary tradition G. has unwittingly placed himself in alliance with critical modes diametrically opposed to his own outlook, modes in which the attempt to treat such traditions is contemptuously termed “source criticism” and is viewed as a pernicious assault on the independence and ultimate superiority of the critic. But G.’s own approach, of course, will be no more palatable to the practitioners of such modes.

It will be useful to take a single poem G. treats and see whether the two systems he rejects are indeed to be “criticis[ed] as mistaken.” The poem is Propertius l. 3, Propertius’ account of his drunken return to the bed of Cynthia. G. completely rejects Cairns’ view that the poem is, generically, a κῶμος, a poem that describes the lover’s attempt, successful or otherwise, to visit the house of his beloved following a drinking-party. G. objects on the grounds that “there is no arrival, no pleading, no violence; no decision, even, by Cynthia whether to admit her lover or not” (p. 53). But the fact is that Propertius does arrive, is drunk, and does make an attempt on the sleeping Cynthia; she awakes and delivers a *querella*.<sup>33</sup> To that extent the poem shows similarities to numerous Hellenistic poems traditionally grouped together as κῶμοι, and although this can only be the starting point for interpretation, it is surely legitimate to acknowledge the poem’s generic affinities. Indeed, Cynthia herself specifies the context of a κῶμος when she assumes (35–36) that Propertius has come to her only after failing to gain admittance at the doors of another woman: “tandem te nostro referens iniuria lecto / alterius clausis expulit e foribus.” To deny the influence of this genre is perverse. We do not expect and will not find in a poem by Propertius a detailed list of all the mandatory motifs of the κῶμος, but that does not mean it is not an influence. What we gain from recognizing that influence is an appreciation of the poet’s adaptation of a traditional and fixed genre to the “realities” (whether the event took place or not) that he has constructed. Propertius l. 3, like all the best Roman poetry, is not in any way a slave to tradition, but neither is it entirely free from tradition. And what is achieved by such a blend of tradition and originality is renovation and revitalization of the tradition.

After rejecting the associations with the κῶμος, G. proceeds to give us his summation of Propertius l. 3: in short, it is precisely what it appears to be—“a poem which begins with a beautiful and touching tableau, and ends with a picture of the lonely Cynthia spinning and singing and waiting for the lover who does not come, until at last she falls asleep” (p. 54). So it does, but this is mere paraphrase, and as critics we want to know more about it than that. And we do, although one could not tell from G.’s analysis or footnotes.

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because the newest version provides the opportunity for renovation of the tradition. The thirty-six Greek epigrams on Myron’s cow (*Anth. Pal.* 9. 713–42, 793–98), to modern taste an exercise in tedium, provide evidence that repetition of themes may have a purely literary, not a social, motivation.

33. At line 18 (*expertae metuens iurgia saevitiae*) we even have the threat of violence that, as G. notes (p. 53), is a feature of the genre—although Propertius inverts the usual situation, for it is Cynthia’s violence, not the komast’s, that is at issue.

This brings us to the other line of approach rejected by G., which sees in the creativity of Roman poetry not so much the perpetuation of genre but rather a more general subsumption of the tradition, often, indeed, involving a deliberate crossing of generic boundaries and an appropriation of elements previously outside the immediate genre. G. has completely failed to cite or treat the works of Alfonsi, Curran, and Ross that have demonstrated beyond any doubt that in technique, diction, and theme the poem shows an immense literary debt, perhaps more so than any other in the *Monobiblos*—to Hellenistic epigram, to Catullus, perhaps to Calvus and Gallus<sup>34</sup>—and that “through the poet’s use of language and techniques . . . we are at one remove from any actual situation.”<sup>35</sup> Consider, for instance, the opening couplet of the poem:

qualis Thesea iacuit cedente carina  
languida desertis Cnosia litoribus

This draws only a paraphrase from G.: “She is like Ariadne, left fast asleep as Theseus sails away” (p. 52). But for the Roman poet, myth is not a disembodied collection of stories, it is rather the body of literary texts in which those stories appear; reference to a myth is at least potentially a literary reference. Propertius’ lines, at the very outset, refer to and invoke the presence of the Ariadne of Catullus 64.<sup>36</sup> The implications of the invocation are enormous: as we read Propertius’ poem we bring to our reading a situation we have seen before, similar but recast in different terms, populated by different (although related) characters. We expect to encounter a Cynthia who, like her literary predecessor, has been wronged and deserted, or at least who believes that she has been. We even expect that she, like Catullus’ Ariadne, will deliver a *querella*, as indeed she does (35–46). She prays that he may suffer as she has (39–40 “‘o utinam talis perducas, improbe, noctes, / me miserum qualis semper habere iubes’”), evoking, in an appropriately milder form, the curse brought down by Ariadne on Theseus at Catullus 64. 200–201 (“‘sed quali solam Theseus me mente reliquit, / tali mente, deae, funestet seque suosque’”). In Cynthia and Propertius we recognize Ariadne and Theseus, and ultimately through them we recognize Catullus himself and his own “personal” world. That we see the events through the eyes of Propertius, the “Theseus-figure,” who although he does not admit to any wrong expects the reaction of an “Ariadne” (18 *expertae metuens iurgia saevitiae*), merely adds to the complexity of the interplay between literary tradition and immediate situation. To deny that interplay is to deny the richness of this poetry and to reduce it to a shadow of itself.

The personal poetry of Catullus (and the other neoterics), of Horace, and of the Augustan elegists is a splendidly complex body of literature, the product of two generations of poets who, with Vergil, effected a more rapid maturation of their nation’s literature than has occurred in any other culture, in any other

34. L. Alfonsi, “Dal ‘Lamento della fanciulla abbandonata’ a Properzio,” *Aegyptus* 44 (1964): 3–8; L. C. Curran, “Vision and Reality in Propertius 1. 3,” *YCS* 19 (1966): 189–207; Ross, *Backgrounds*, pp. 54–57.

35. Ross, *Backgrounds*, p. 57.

36. Cf., in that poem, lines 53 *Thesea cedentem celeri cum classe tuetur* and 133 “*deserto liquisti in litore. Theseu?*”



comparable period of time. So many ingredients contribute to this maturation: individual genius, the discovery of Alexandrian poetics, the realization that the intimidating achievement of Greek literature could be transformed from an intolerable burden into a positive and formative source of influence, and, of course, the coming to birth of a society whose tensions and complexities might be reflected in the tensions and complexities of the poetry. As readers we may pick and choose—all art allows a personal and private response. But if as critics we choose to ignore the complexity, if like G. we find that poetry is (again) “about the many and various things which it professes to be about, such as life and love” (p. 49), then we will fail as critics, for we have failed to demonstrate why these texts can never be conclusively defined or simply explained, why they allow us as readers and critics to return to them again and again as they offer us new and diverse layers of meaning. And, in a sense, if we remain on the surface we merely testify to the poet’s successful integration of literary tradition and reality. Horace, however, and doubtless the rest of them, expected more of us (*Epist.* 2. 1. 224–25):

... cum lamentamur non apparere labores  
nostros et tenui deducta poemata filo.

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